Planning for sustainability, or sustainable development, is a concept originally associated with environmental policy. It has been broadened to include all community planning including planning for economic development. It links concerns for social, economic, and environmental well being in a coordinated process aimed at meeting present needs while preserving the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Emergency management has been increasingly linked to this broader task of sustainable development (Beatley, 19995; Gis and Kutzmark, 1995) and hazard mitigation has been a primary vehicle for that linkage (Mileti, 1999; Schneider, 2002). The emphasis is on reducing the vulnerability of communities to natural and manmade disasters in the context of all other community goals such as reducing poverty, providing jobs, promoting a strong economy, and generally improving people's living conditions (FEMA, 2000).

The achievement of sustainable development, as a public value, requires responsible choices for determining where and how development should proceed. It requires, from the emergency management perspective, an evaluation by each locality of its environmental resources and hazard risk potential with the result being the making of a series of choices that will impact the economic, social, and physical well being of the community. These choices include the identification of future losses that a community can or is willing to bear. But all public choices relating to these matters must adhere to the value of sustainability as defined in the context of the broader community planning and development process.

All emergency managers know that communities must address the interdependent causes of natural and manmade disasters and come to some decision about which potential risks and losses are acceptable, which are unacceptable, and what specific actions are necessary to maintain the social, economic, and political stability necessary for the community to flourish. But they seldom perceive this in the context of a broader role for emergency management in community planning. But consider the connection between the two. For example, if a community is seeking to promote sustainability in the face of serious earthquake risks, structural mitigation alone is insufficient. Much more is required than building codes and the like. Sustainability also requires a linkage of policies on building codes to policies on housing density, to policies on urban transit, to policies on social equality, to policies on environmental quality, to policies on economic development, etc. In other words, all policies are linked together by the concept of sustainability. This includes emergency management policy and brings the emergency management function to the table as a participant in community planning.

The goal of building sustainable communities involves, and as a critical component, the emergency management function. The logic of hazard mitigation, a key focus, suggests that a part of ensuring the economic, political, and social development of a community is a full awareness of hazard risks and a plan to mitigate them. Community planning and development must include anticipation of and solutions to identifiable risks associated with potential hazards. But, to the extent that emergency management is unprepared as a profession to assert its relevance to the broader life of the community, to the extent that it remains disaster driven, narrow, and technical in its orientation, the effectiveness and relevance of the new emergency management will be restricted even if there is a greater and growing awareness of its connection to broader issues and concerns. The new and wider context of emergency management requires a new and more broadly engaged emergency management professional.